

Racing Committee Guidelines for Club Race Officers

Following a number of comments and requests from members, the following guidelines are offered to Club Race Officers.

A few basics

Your objective is to facilitate a good days racing for those members that want it. You are probably a member of this group and you appreciate well managed club racing. So what you will provide for your fellow members is the same as you expect when you are racing. The most important item that you bring to the party is that you know what the product looks like when it works. Everything else can be provided by the club and your fellow members if you ask.

So the most important guideline is - ask for help if you need it.

Next - you need to prepare properly. Get familiar with Racing Rules of Sailing (RRS) - Race Signals and Part 3 - Conduct of a Race. Read and understand the club racing Sailing Instructions (SIs). You have probably been meaning to do this for a long time - so now is that time. Find out what the tide will be doing on the day. Follow the weather patterns and have a good idea what to expect. Find out who is on the team, phone them up or email them in advance and see if they are going to turn up. Speak to the club and find out which boats are working and which committee boat you have got. If you don't know how to drive it; ask to be shown the previous weekend.

Next - give yourself enough time on the day. Cancel all other engagements and get down early. Use the Office computers and check the mean wind direction over the last few hours using CHIMET and CAMBERMET. If there is no wind or it is too strong or too variable then stick up a postponement and wait. Otherwise get on the boat and set off for the course area at least one hour in advance of the start - two hours if in the bay. Aim to be sitting waiting for the competitors at least a quarter of an hour before the first flag goes up.

So much for the basics; now to detail.

Relationship between RRS and SIs

We run racing using both of these so you need to know both. You should refer to these when you carry out any operation; of course you can be assured that all the familiar activities are in accordance with both.

The RRS are the primary document and they delegate powers to the Notice of Race (NOR) and the SIs. You do not need to worry about the NOR. Where the club has chosen to tune the modus operandi to local conditions the SIs will change the RRS and then the appropriate SI will reference the relevant rule. You may wish to read that rule and see what we do differently. However, you need to know that if an operation is to be carried out according to the RRS then the SIs will not mention it at all; you have to look directly in the RRS. These are the most important RRS that you will encounter as a race officer.

Race Signals; At the back of the RRS; tells you what each flag means.

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Definition of Finish; At the front of the RRS.

Expert Race Officers reference the RRS whenever they do unfamiliar activities during the race. That is how they get it right so do not worry if you have to do the same. (The book is pocket sized for that precise reason.)

Committee boat or club line start?

The default is for a Committee Boat start. Run a club line start when ...

- There is no available committee boat.
- It's Wednesday evening!
- There are very few competitors (usually because it's very windy or cold). However, be aware of pre judging this.
- You are very short of helpers.

Otherwise run a Committee Boat start.

Of the club start lines the east line is the most useful. In a southerly or a northerly it is reasonably fair for a windward start. In easterly or westerly winds, you can use for downwind starts.

Use the south line when you have a north easterly as the east line is nearly unusable. Not only is it very biased to the buoy end but the competitors cannot see the club as it is on the other side of the mainsail and the wind takes away the sound signals which are in any case a quarter mile away. Also use it if setting a bay course in a south westerly.

Avoid using the north line if at all possible. Bear in mind that when the line is buoy end biased then the competitors cannot see or hear your signals.

You can make other arrangements (Sandy - visitors buoy or inflatable for instance). However, these are a change to the SIs and have to be signalled accordingly.

Setting a start line from the Committee boat

Firstly, this must be in accordance with the club SIs. You must also make sure that it is fair - that is all the boats can get an even start. The principals are.

- 1) Anchor the Committee Boat in the required place. The boat will lie to tide and not to wind so give it time to settle. Check that there is enough chain down by taking a transit on a shore feature and testing that it does not move.
- 2) Calculate the mean wind direction. Take 90 degrees off that value.
- 3) Set the ODM on that bearing. Get a RIB to lay it and ask them to 'trail' the buoy.
- 4) Now..watch the boats sailing across it and see what it looks like. Ask yourself the question "Where would I start on this line?". If the line is plainly biased then ask the RIB to move the mark accordingly. Don't be embarrassed at having to do this several times. If you are in doubt ask one of the senior sailors sailing around you what they think and act accordingly.
- 5) Having got the bearing about right set the length. It needs to be long enough for the largest fleet - err on the long side.

Why is the correct angle not what you thought? There are two main reasons for this.

Firstly your compass is reading wrong because the committee boat has a great big lump of iron right under your feet. And there is another one at the bow holding the anchor.

Accordingly what the compass told you about the wind direction is inaccurate and so is your judgement of 90 degrees.

Secondly you are probably in tide and therefore the wind you see is not what the boats see. So you have to go on what they are doing.

Try this exercise...

Before the first start stand in the middle of the Committee Boat and look to the windward mark. The orange flag will be blowing from front to back overhead. Over your left shoulder will be the orange ODM flag. Over your right shoulder will be the blue flag for the finish. If you have a leeward mark turn through 180 degrees and there it should be right in front of you.

If you get a different experience then something fundamental needs changing.

Harbour or Bay?

Most members want to sail in the Bay more than they do. A lot of members would prefer a good sail in the Bay over a good race in the Harbour; at least for some of the time.

However no member wants to be running in against a strong ebb tide or plugging a flood

tide for hours to make the start or get home. You should consider a Committee Boat start in the Bay or a club line start and a course in the Bay.

- when the tides are slack or boats can go out on the ebb and return on the flood.
- when the wind is not too strong or too light.
- when the weather forecast for the next few hours is benign
- when there is plenty of safety cover available.

Courses.

While you are responsible for the courses used you should consult with the senior racers on site about what to do on the day. This not only enables you to provide what the guys want; but it also distributes the responsibility if it all goes pear shaped.....

You can use fixed marks or the club inflatables or a mixture of them. There are risks and benefits attached to both approaches.

- The problem with fixed marks is...
 - You cannot move them when the wind shifts.
 - There may not be one where you want.
 - They are boat and person hostile.
 - Other clubs in the harbour use them as well so they can get busy. As a result, most of them are in pairs and with one handed to port and the other to starboard. This handing is mandatory so don't ignore it.
- The problem with inflatables is...
 - The course can be set too small so that every boat in the club ends up getting in each others way.
 - They all look alike and there are other events using inflatables to get confused with.
 - They can sink or drift or be moved by mistake.

A good set of courses will be a package that you can manage easily and will...

- Provide each type of boat with as varied and exciting points of sailing as possible.
- Make best use of the available water.
- Force competitors to make route decisions on as many legs as possible.
- Last the appropriate amount of time for each class.
- Not set slow boats into a very strong tide
- Not set keel boats or fast dinghies across shallow water
- Not have the same leeward mark for all types of class.
- Not go near the harbour entrance if the tide is ebbing and the wind is dropping.
- Enable you to shorten it without confusing the competitors. See below.

Shortening.

You will need to be familiar with the RRS (rule 32 and the definition of finishing) and the SIs.

- If shortening on the water ensure that the boat you are using to shorten from
 - has both a blue flag and a flag S displayed.
 - is sitting on the side of the mark that the boats are rounding. You must ensure that the boats finish as if they were rounding the mark in accordance with the course instructions. They have to comply with the definition of finishing in the RRS and you risk the 'hook finish' protest if you are not careful.
- If shortening from the clubhouse. This requires care as the rules are ambiguous.
 - They are ambiguous because the finish line extends from the club to 'a rounding mark'. Which one is not specified. So you have to ensure that different fleets approaching different marks are not confused. When you have more than one fleet

racing ensure that you identify the appropriate fleet by flying the class flag with flag S.

- Sandy is a special case. The finish line will not be at Sandy which is rounded in accordance with the course instructions. Boats then proceed to a finish line which will be either Club Line North (to North West Pilsey) or Club Finish Line / Club Line East (to North West Winner). This is to avoid the 'hook finish' protest and to ensure that boats comply with the definition of finishing.

Recalls.

- These are usually caused by a line laid poorly - or a wind shift that makes it so - or too short. If you see the problem early do not be afraid to postpone the start and reset the line - you don't need to wait for the start. You need to have the answering pennant rigged before the sequence.
- If you can identify the premature starter(s) you must signal this immediately by flying flag X. Therefore, ensure that this flag is rigged ready to go before the sequence.
- In addition the line spotter must use a flag X on a pole held up as soon as the gun goes. Then fly the flag from the boat as well. Leave it up until all the premature starters have returned or it is clear that they are not going to.
- If you have a lot of unidentified early starters then you need a General Recall. This is therefore another flag to have rigged and ready to go.
- It is best to try and retain the original order of the starts so rerun the recalled start before moving on with the next fleet. The starts are in their chosen order because starting the fast boats first reduces the contact each fleet has with the others. Getting a slow fleet going and then launching a fast fleet after them will cause problems.

Length of races.

The extremes are dictated by the time limits in the SIs. You must not exceed them.

As a general rule make the races about half the time limit for the lead boat.

This is one and a half hours if there is one race per day and one hour if there are two.

Do not make races shorter than this unless you have good reason. Also do not shorten races unnecessarily (see RRS 32). If individual competitors want to stop racing then that is their choice.

How to handle a 2 race day without too much delay.

The big problem with two races in a day is the delay experienced by competitors between their races. There are several steps you can take which will help.

Firstly - do you need to run back to back? It might be better to publish a start time for the second races on the ONB and let competitors come ashore.

Secondly - You do not have to wait until all the first flight races are complete before getting the second flight underway. Also realise that you can run the second flight in a different order than the published one.

Other strategies involve splitting the team to enable one part to complete finishing whilst the other gets the new flight underway. The most obvious way to do this when operating from a Committee Boat is to set the courses to finish at the clubhouse where your finish team will be. If you set courses that do not have the Committee Boat as a mark of the course you can ensure that the Committee Boat becomes a start boat only. Then you can move it around.

If these steps are not feasible - then try and set courses that separate the classes out and prevent them from all finishing at the same time. And try and do the obvious things like checking the start line and making sure that any reset is done before the first race finishes. Similarly check inflatables and get them into their new positions while you are finishing rather than between the finish and the restart.

Average Lap Races.

If you have the whole spread of club classes to handle then the laps need to last about 30 minutes for the slow boats. So in an hour and a half they will do 3 laps and the hydrofoilers will do 6. Make sure that each lap conforms to the course advise above.

It is essential that each lap is identical. This means that each lap must start at the start line and go through it each lap and the start line must not be biased with one end used at the start and the other end every other time.

You will also finish the race on the start line. So ensure that the previous mark (from which the approach to the finish line will be made) is chosen such that it enables boats to both finish correctly and conform to the course instructions; or you will risk the 'hook finish ' protest.

You will need to keep records for all the boats for each lap. Prepare a work sheet for this in advance.

Protests.

Unless you have an interest in these matters you are advised not to witness incidents between competitors.

If a competitor seeks redress from a protest committee for a problem encountered during the racing then you may need to explain your actions at a hearing. Make sure that you have adequate notes and seek guidance if needed.

Avoid these please...

There are a few additional problems that you will want to avoid.

- If the fleet is generally late for the start then wait for them. Do not get going without them as that will spoil the day for everyone. You don't need to wait for tail end charlie but you have to have the bulk of the members.
- ...especially if it's your fault as you did not get the course on the ONB to give them enough time. If you are late make sure that all competitors have time to launch - especially those in the first start.
- On an ebb tide you should avoid having competitors near the harbour entrance. Even if you do this you will not want disabled boats floating out the harbour so station a patrol boat as the 'wicket keeper' in the harbour mouth.
- Spoiling the day by trying to rush because you have a later engagement. Clear the diary and make sure that you can give this task your undivided attention.
- Starting the racing before the wind arrives. In the summer we can often expect a sea breeze to arrive later. We have all day so we can wait.
- Cancelling racing when it's windy much too early. Wait until near the advertised start time and then make a decision based on the requirements of the guys who have turned up. Remember that some classes are happy to sail in a lot more wind than others.
- The 'hook finish' protest. The RRS define a finish as follows "A boat finishes when any part of her hull, or crew or equipment in normal position, crosses the finishing line in the direction of the course from the last mark..." "This latter phrase means that the course instructions handing a mark are disregarded if they conflict with the definition. To avoid complications take care that all boats can comply with both RRS and course instructions. Ask for guidance if necessary.
- Flag Y is flown to indicate that everyone has to wear their buoyancy aids. Do not do this unless it is clearly windy. Making members wear buoyancy aids in light winds is unnecessary and sometimes unpleasant.
- Threatening to not run races when we have been let down by your team not turning up. All you have to do is run simpler racing...